



Doncaster Council

Report

23rd June 2021

To: The Mayor and Members of the Cabinet

To accept funding from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government for delivering a welcome back fund, a follow on from the recently delivered Re-opening High Streets fund

Relevant Cabinet Member(s)	Wards Affected	Key Decision
Cllr Glyn Jones	All	Yes

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. In response to the Coronavirus, COVID-19, in June 2020 the Government announced an award of £50 million to local councils to deliver a re-opening High Streets safely programme. Doncaster Council were allocated £276,789 through this fund. The money is ERDF money but with a 100% intervention meaning no financial match is required.
2. Councils were requested to submit an action plan which would cover activity eligible under the fund. A steering group was formed to put together a plan for spend. This was approved by Cabinet and Exec Board. The subsequent plan was approved by MHCLG and delivery of the plan was executed. Grant was spent on items such as sanitiser units across the main high streets in the borough, safety promotional messages including talking and digital signs in the town centres throughout the borough and a pedestrian safety scheme on Nether Hall Road being delivered by Doncaster Council major projects team.
3. In March 2021 ahead of non-essential retail re-opening on 12th April, the government allocated a further £276,790 to Doncaster Council under what is now called the Welcome Back Fund.
4. All budget has to be spent by March 2022 with the updated plan submitted to MHCLG by 30th May 2021. The plan can be amended after this date following agreement with an allocated contract manager.

EXEMPT REPORT

5. The report is not exempt.
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RECOMMENDATIONS

6. It is recommended that Cabinet:

Approves the acceptance of the grant funding to be utilised as per the safety measures set out in the approved Action Plan at Appendix 1.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE CITIZENS OF DONCASTER?

7. Town centres and local high streets in the borough will have increased COVID-19 safety measures put in place to help keep them informed and safe. Events will also take place to encourage footfall in these areas and to support businesses

BACKGROUND

8. There is a need to spend the money quickly to put measure in place to improve the safety of our high streets for residents in light of ongoing changes to the government roadmap and the need to spend the money by the end of March 2022
9. The Welcome Back fund is an extension of the original re-opening High Street fund. Regulations for spending the fund were received on 16th April. Although MHCLG are not expecting a new project plan but an update of the existing plan to approve they have added new areas of spend and slightly adjusted the criteria.

There were four measure in scope under the original fund:

- Support to develop an action plan
- Communication and public information activity to ensure re-opening high streets are managed successfully and safely
- Business facing awareness activities to ensure that re-opening local economies are managed safely
- Temporary public realm changes to ensure that re-opening of local economies can be managed successfully and safely

Now added is

Support to promote a safe public environment for a local areas visitor economy, which can include:

- Placed based marketing, for example, supporting safe celebration events on high streets and in local towns.
- Marshals.
- Public space maintenance.
- Maintenance of public conveniences (toilets) including new temporary facilities (toilets) provision.
- Beautification activities including graffiti removal.
- Non-permanent public realm adaptations.

- Activities that future proof the high street.
- Improvement of green spaces and provision of outdoor seating areas.

Support local authorities to develop plans for responding to the medium-term impact of Covid-19 including trialling new ideas particularly where these relate to the High Street

- The strand will support opportunities to further develop, pilot projects and strategic responses to address and reverse the long-term impacts of covid-19 on local economies, particularly where they relate to the high street.
- In addition, where temporary changes to the public realm are being proposed as a part of a trial the respective local authority should work in partnership with public sector landowners as appropriate.

10. One of the main changes of the guidance which is now much more explicit in that the fund should be spent on high streets across towns and cities not just the main town centre. It is also clear that more consultation should be carried out with businesses, towns and parish councils in how this funding is spent and to partner them in delivery

'MHCLG expects local authorities to engage with stakeholders including local businesses, Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), Destination Management Organisations (DMO), town and parish councils. Where appropriate, MHCLG encourages local authorities to enter into suitable delivery partnership arrangements with town and parish councils to improve delivery outcomes for communities and high streets'

11. The project team who delivered the Re—Opening High Street fund have met to discuss the Welcome Back fund and due to lessons learnt from delivering that fund, new government guidelines and interest from parties across the borough recommended the following. The team is

Chris Dungworth	(Chair)
Lorna Reeve	(Visit Doncaster)
Andrew McMahon	(Town Centre)
Adrian Banks	(Business Doncaster)
Karen South	(Policy, Insight and Change)
Charlotte Coupe	(Communications)
Glyn Sparrow	(Corporate Procurement)
Sandra Gough	(Major Projects)
Michaela Rowlands	(Street Scene)

12. Localities leads consulted and discussed with local stakeholders and brought forward recommendations for spend to the steering group
13. Because of the tight timescales on submitting an updated project plan to MLCLG (31st May) it was not possible to consult widely
14. Based on the recommendations the steering group completed an up to date project plan and submitted to MHCLG for approval by the deadline date of 30th May. This project plan needs sign off by the MHCLG project manager and can subsequently be changed

15. It is important to note that all members have been emailed seeking their feedback and suggestions. We will then work with members to accommodate any suggestions we receive into the project plan.
16. Once approved the steering Group will oversee procurement of spend and delivery of the plan
17. Representations from MP's and elected members have been made asking how they can get involved using the funding in their areas
18. Breakdown of spend

	BUDGET
Doncaster Town Centre	£15,200
Doncaster Central	£65,200
Doncaster North	£65,200
Doncaster East	£65,200
Doncaster South	£65,200
TOTAL	£276,000.00

The Re-opening High Street committee having already discussed ideas with localities are recommending the following projects subject to agreement and sign off with Cabinet. There has been a reduction in the number of town centre projects put forward due to less budget and increased budget to other localities.

- Continuation of key safety messages across social media, print and digital advertising.
 - Installation / Repair of electrical outlets – Several electric points in the town centre were decommissioned a few years ago. These could be repaired, or new ones installed to be used for events or for pop up business stalls to improve the vibrancy of the town centre.
 - Marketing and promotion of high streets and shopping parades across the borough with safety messages and a 'buy local' theme
 - Seating repairs and improvements across all major high streets to encourage visitors and make them safer for residents
 - Welcome signs on fencing and welcome bollards on lampposts and bollards to encourage visitors and add vibrancy to high streets
 - Wrapping of empty shop fronts, shutters to improve vibrancy and improve the look of high streets
19. The scheme criteria had a large number of exceptions which included not giving money direct to businesses, which had to be factored in when putting together a project plan
 20. All measures put in place have to be of a temporary nature
 21. All measures have to be in place and the money spent and claims submitted by 31st March 2022

22. The plan only includes projects to be delivered. Additional revenue for staff time i.e. additional cleaning has to be picked up by council budgets.
23. An updated action plan will be submitted and discussed with MHCLG following further consultations and activities agreed

OPTIONS CONSIDERED

24. Option 1: Do Nothing

There was the option not to accept the funding but this would have resulted in some of the work not being carried out and some of the cleaning / safety measures required being resourced from existing council budgets

Option 2: Accept the grant and deliver a project plan

By accepting the funding it allows the council to utilise external resource and deliver a project plan aimed at supporting making the high streets across the borough safer to combat COVID-19, increasing the use of safety messages for residents and make outlying town centres cleaner and more attractive to residents

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED OPTION

25. **Option 2** is the recommended option as it provides additional government funding to spend on measure to make our high streets safer for residents and visitors and helps combat the further potential spread of COVID-19

IMPACT ON THE COUNCIL'S KEY OUTCOMES

26.

	Outcomes	Implications
	<p>Doncaster Working: Our vision is for more people to be able to pursue their ambitions through work that gives them and Doncaster a brighter and prosperous future;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better access to good fulfilling work • Doncaster businesses are supported to flourish • Inward Investment 	<p>The programme has positive implications for all residents of Doncaster boroughs</p>
	<p>Doncaster Living: Our vision is for Doncaster's people to live in a borough that is vibrant and full of opportunity, where people enjoy spending time;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The town centres are the beating heart of Doncaster 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More people can live in a good quality, affordable home • Healthy and Vibrant Communities through Physical Activity and Sport • Everyone takes responsibility for keeping Doncaster Clean • Building on our cultural, artistic and sporting heritage 	
	<p>Doncaster Learning: Our vision is for learning that prepares all children, young people and adults for a life that is fulfilling;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every child has life-changing learning experiences within and beyond school • Many more great teachers work in Doncaster Schools that are good or better • Learning in Doncaster prepares young people for the world of work 	
	<p>Doncaster Caring: Our vision is for a borough that cares together for its most vulnerable residents;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children have the best start in life • Vulnerable families and individuals have support from someone they trust • Older people can live well and independently in their own homes 	
	<p>Connected Council:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A modern, efficient and flexible workforce • Modern, accessible customer interactions • Operating within our resources and delivering value for money • A co-ordinated, whole person, whole life focus on the needs and aspirations of residents • Building community resilience and self-reliance by connecting community assets and strengths • Working with our partners and residents to provide effective leadership and governance 	

RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS

27. There is a risk that the project will not be delivered on time and as this is a ERDF programme MHCLG may require financial claw back
28. The project actions as detailed in the plan must be temporary in nature. Some of the actions that are proposed to be delivered have the capacity and opportunity to become permanent as which stage financial claw back penalties may be imposed.
29. Risk that all spend has not been defrayed by the 31st March 2022 would mean funding couldn't be claimed for those items. This would then be shown as overspend against the relevant service area

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS [ND 01/06/21]

30. Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 gives the Council a general power of competence to do anything that individuals may generally do. Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972 gives the Council the power to purchase goods and services.
31. The Council will be asked to enter into a funding contract. The funding contract is likely to set out delivery measures and the money provided must be used in accordance with the terms and conditions of the funding contract.
32. The Council must comply with all laws and regulatory requirements when delivering the scheme (including, without limitation compliance with all laws and regulatory requirements relating to public procurement and subsidies) when administering the funding. Failure to comply with such terms may lead to claw back.
33. Following contract signature, the scheme manager should be completely familiar with the contractual terms in order to protect the interest of the Council and enforce any terms as and when necessary.
34. Further legal advice and assistance will be given as the scheme progresses.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS [BC 01/06/21]

35. In 2020, as a result of the impact of Covid-19, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) announced that Councils across England were to share £50m of additional funding from ERDF grant to support the safe re-opening of high streets and commercial areas (Re-opening the High Street Safely Fund/ROHSSF). Doncaster's allocation from this award was £276,789. An action plan was approved by MHCLG and acceptance of the grant to spend in accordance with that action plan was agreed by Executive Decision on 14th December 2020.
36. Building on the above allocation, MHCLG have announced a further £56m Welcome Back Fund (WBF), of which Doncaster has been awarded £276,790.

37. The grant is at a 100% intervention rate and therefore there is no requirement for the Council to identify match funding
38. The existing grant funding agreement between the Council and MHCLG for the ROHSSF will be varied to include an extension to the original spend deadline and the additional WBF allocation. Expenditure to be reimbursed from both of these allocations (ROHSSF and WBF) must be defrayed by 31st March 2022.
39. The action plan at Appendix 1 to this report sets out the proposed use of the WBF allocation. This is subject to agreement by MHCLG
40. A separate revenue cost centre has been created to capture the WBF project costs. Activity included in the attached action plan is temporary in nature and therefore it is not anticipated that there will be any capital expenditure in relation to WBF.
41. All project costs must be managed within the grant available as no additional budget has been identified to support these, however it is acknowledged that there could be increased on-going revenue costs as a result of this activity which would need to be met from existing service budget. Service Managers should be consulted where this may be the case. Budget pressures arising as a result of the scheme should be highlighted for consideration as part of the annual budget setting process .
42. All of the above is subject to a signed variation to the original funding agreement between the Council and MHCLG which sets out the terms and conditions of the grant and cover issues such as eligibility, risks, and claw back. No expenditure should be incurred or contracts awarded until all of the necessary requirements are in place. The approval of this decision by the Executive will allow for the signing of the variation to the funding agreement.
43. In order to claim grant, all of the expenditure incurred in relation to the project must be eligible and comply with the terms and conditions of the grant funder, Failure to do so could lead to claw back up to the full value of the grant. The project officer must also administer the grant in line with the Council's Contract and Financial Procedure Rules (particularly rule E for External Arrangements). However, as an EU grant the funder's terms and conditions are one of the most stringent and in certain cases exceed the provisions of the Council's minimum requirements. In the past, the Council has suffered claw back in relation to EU projects, particularly in respect of procurement and where interpretation of the terms and conditions differ from that of the auditor. The project officer should be aware of the issues surrounding compliance with both the internal and external requirements to reduce the risk of claw back happening.
44. FPR's also require that Directors are responsible for ensuring that plans are in place (including exit strategies) for all external funding within the

Directorate, including any associated cost which cannot be recovered from the project funding.

HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS [A.A 02/06/2021]

45. There are no direct HR Implications in relation to this report and the proposal to accept the grant and deliver a project plan.

TECHNOLOGY IMPLICATIONS [PW 28/05/21]

46. There are no anticipated technology implications associated with this report.

HEALTH IMPLICATIONS [RS 01/06/2021]

47. The Welcome Back fund should support the reopening of the 'high street' in a COVID secure way.

EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS [CJD 28/05/2021]

48. There are no equality implications associated with this report.

CONSULTATION

49. Consultations have taken place with a number of Doncaster Council departments along with MHCLG representatives

BACKGROUND PAPERS

50. Appendix 1 Action Plan

GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ERDF = European Regional Development Fund

MHCLG = Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government

REPORT AUTHOR & CONTRIBUTORS

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